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BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS OBSERVED IN HOUSEHOLD HORSES, IN RURAL ROMANIA

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Abstract: Horses (*Equus caballus*) are a domestic animal species that is prone to behavioral problems, if their environment is unapropriate. In this study we wanted to point out the behavioral problems that occur in household horses, used for labor, that live in the rural parts of Romania. We formed a questionnaire that was meant to asses the living conditions and welfare of the horses. Initially, we took into study 16 horses from the Giarmata, Timiș county; the group was formed from 13 mares, 2 stallions and 1 gelding, after which we extended our work to another 115 horses, as follows: 23 from Parța commune, 38 from Voiteg, and 38 from Jebel commune, all residing in Timiș county. 98% of horses were not housed in proper enclosures and developed xylophagia, hitting the ground with the front hoof and not obeying commands.

• Introduction

Horses are prone to a suite of behavioral problems, especially if housed and cared for improperly. In the following paper, we wanted to point out those behaviors, in relation to horses that belong to a certain population in Romania, that being the rural area, where horses are still used for labor. People there use horses to plow the soil and for carriage transportation, in order for their owner to provide for their other livestock, and families.

We wanted to identify the human error in caring for horses, and how to improve the wellbeing of this category of horses.

• Material and method

For our study we used a questionnaire, comprised of multiple parts, as follows:

- Part 1: ID data of horses
- Part 2: data about the harness used and/or it's components
- Part 3: Behavioral changes, if any
- Part 4: Lifestyle and housing characteristics of each horse

Initially, we tested our method on a group of 16 horses from one commune in the Timiș county, that were housed as follows:

- 3 horses were housed alone
- 8 horses were sharing the stable with other horses
- 5 horses were sharing the stable with other animals

(cows or pigs)

We then extended our study to another 115 horses, from three different communes in Timiș county

• Results and discussions

Total no. of horses	Of which with behavioral problems	Xylophagia	Hitting ground with front hoof	Disobeying commands
131	128	48	122	32

• Conclusions

1. 98% of the horses we took into study were improperly housed, and didn't have the required personal space, leading to behaviors such as xylophagia, hitting the ground with the front hoof and disobeying commands;
2. Most of the enclosures were small and didn't meet minimal microclimate standards, leading to fear and a desire for movement in the horses;
3. Over 50% of horses had improvised harnesses, and were overused for work, leading to horses that tried to avoid work, leading to owners interpreting it as disobeying commands;
4. For a reduction in abnormal behavior, we recommend starting by educating the owners, this method having an estimate 80% of problems solved.